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ABSTRACT

This booklet examines aging, exposing various stereotypes and biases and describing the truth about aging. These topics are discussed: (1) the absence of older adults from printed and aduiovisual materials and the need to ensure that elderly persons be visible in all communications; (2) societal myths that deny older persons their individuality; (3) biases about the physical health of older adults and the reality of the self-sufficiency of the vast majority; (4) economic conditions of older adults (debunking the myths that older adults have nothing to contribute and live on food stamps); (5) stereotypes about the activity levels of older persons and the dynamic process of growth and development in older adults; (6) family, friend, and love relationships of older adults; and (7) the accumulated experiences of older adults which are markedly different from those of younger persons. The next section lists 10 recommendations to help avoid ageism and supplant it with a realistic portrait of growing old. The impact of words is discussed and examples of biased word passages are given. Stereotyped depictions of old age are cited and alternative depictions are described. Practical suggestions are made for presenting materials in a manner which will accommodate the visual and audiovisual handicaps older persons may have. (ABL)

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Truth About Aging

GUIDELINES FOR ACCURATE COMMUNICATIONS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Truth About Aging

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American Association of Retired Persons
Special Projects Section
Program Department

Aging is a fact of life. Everybody is doing it.

Ageism—negative discrimination on the basis of age—is also a fact of life. And, unfortunately, all too many people are doing it.

All forms of communication—whether designed to teach, inform, convince, or entertain—express the underlying values and biases of our society. Since ageist attitudes exist in American life, it follows they will appear, however unwittingly, in our print and other communications. Older persons are often rendered "invisible" in literature and films, or stereotyped as decrepit, lonely, or mean-spirited individuals.

Like all prejudices, ageism is inaccurate and harmful. The pernicious effects of ageism, however, are not limited to older persons. Their impact on youngsters is particularly sad. Studies show that when young people develop a negative view of aging and of older persons, they may lower their goals for achievement in later life.

Biases against aging are often so deeply ingrained in our culture that they are difficult to identify. They unintentionally creep into our writing, films, and conversation. Only through a conscious effort on the part of publishers, producers, advertisers, writers, and other communicators can ageism be eliminated. But the benefits are well worth the effort. First, communications will be more accurate, thus realistic. Second, they may enjoy a larger audience. And third, in a broader sense, such efforts may help individuals—older and younger alike—realize their potential, thereby enhancing the well-being of our society.

This section of the brochure contains facts about the effects of aging to be kept in mind by communicators who seek to avoid discriminatory depictions. In a quick, easy-to-read format, it covers major areas of concern, including health, economics, and relationships with others. Success in avoiding unintentional discrimination

depends on the awareness, knowledge, and willingness of the communicator to identify and avoid ageist stereotypes.

The second section (pages 24-34) deals with color, type, and other specifics to keep in mind for print and broadcast productions. It includes some general guidelines to help ensure that productions are as accessible as possible to the majority of older persons.

THE INVISIBLE GENERATION

The most common treatment of older persons is not to treat them at all. Although older persons participate in virtually all daily activities, they are often absent from printed and audio-visual materials.

Approximately one out of every four Americans is over 50 years of age. The proportion is growing. By 2030, it is estimated that one in three Americans will be age 50 or over.

The 64.2 million older persons account for 27% of the population, blacks for 12%, Hispanics for 6%, and Asians and Pacific Islanders for 2%.

Showing that older persons take part in the mainstream of life is necessary for accuracy and is a crucial, relatively simple, first step in combating age prejudice. Elderly persons need to be visible in all communications and included, where possible, in approximate proportion to their numbers in contemporary America.

The portrayal of older women requires particular emphasis. The majority of older persons (age 50 and above) are women. They outnumber men by a ratio of 100 to 55.

AGE-OLD STEREOTYPES

Biased/Ageist: What does an old man like that want with a sports car?
Not Biased/Non-Ageist: Now that his children are on their own, he can have that sports car he's always wanted.

Biased: That man she's with must be half her age!
Not Biased: Men of all ages find her attractive.

Biased: When people get old, they become more fault-finding, irritable, and demanding.
Not Biased: Some people are more fault-finding, irritable, and demanding than others.

Biased: Ask my grandmother, I'm sure she'll do it. She always has plenty of time.
Not Biased: Ask my grandmother. She always tries to make time to help others.

The societal myths and stereotypes that surround old age deny older persons their individuality. The instruction "act your age" is intended to allow older persons only a very narrow spectrum of acceptable behaviors, activities, and even dress. The depth of our bias is shown in our reaction, or lack of it, to common descriptions of the aged: lonely, idle, dowdy.

The stereotyping of older women is particularly strong. They are shown almost exclusively in kinship roles as wives, mothers, and grandmothers in domestic settings. "Shrew," "hag," and "crone" are but three of a wide selection of negative words to describe an older woman. The English language lacks similar words with positive connotations.

The exploration of different lifestyles and behaviors that other age groups have undertaken has not escaped the older population. Its members, too, are actively seeking alternatives. Age constraints, however, are perhaps the strongest social prohibition. A sexually active older man, for example, is termed lecherous, not virile; the sexually active older woman is frequently portrayed as odd or pathetic, not alluring.

While the negative stereotype is the most common presentation of old age, it is equally important not to glamorize the aging experience. The image of completely carefree retirement

years is as inaccurate as suggesting that all older persons are poverty stricken. Older people struggle each day with the same economic, social, and psychological problems as do people of other ages.

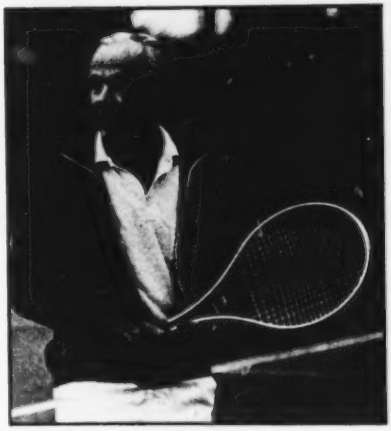
Older persons no more fit a stereotype than members of other arbitrary groupings of people. The only blanket assertion that applies to all older people is that they have lived longer. They have come from every strata of society, are active in their communities and have friends, families, and lovers. Older persons are individuals and showing them as such can give added variety and depth to communications.

Biased: I hate the thought of getting older because all getting older means is physical complaints and illness.
Not Biased: Getting old is natural, and sure beats dying. I'm going to take care of myself now so I'll feel good later.

Biased: All old people are invalids.
Not Biased: Most old people are self-sufficient.

Biased: The old are always sick and end up in nursing homes.
Not Biased: Everyone gets sick sometimes and the elderly are no exception. While older persons are generally more susceptible to disease and injury, few live in nursing homes.

Physical changes and loss of health are perhaps the most feared aspects of growing older. The fact is that older persons do require health care more often and for longer periods of time than young people. Older persons are also more susceptible to disease and injury than other adults. Yet, these facts form only part of the picture.



Most of the physical changes that occur with age are not debilitating. Furthermore, because Americans of all ages are healthier and enjoy better medical care today than a generation ago, with a longer life today comes an increased ability to enjoy the additional years.

The most obvious physical consequence of aging is in appearance and it starts the day we are born. Beauty may be in the eye of the beholder, but it is defined by society and for years Americans have emphasized youth.

While certain diseases and ailments may be more prevalent among older persons, they are not unique to the elderly. For instance in 1982, of the over 11 million visually impaired Americans, almost four million are young or middle aged.

The vast majority of older persons are self-sufficient. In 1983, 67% of elderly persons lived independently — alone, with family members or with non-relatives. Nursing homes are not an inevitable, or even likely result of growing older. Only 5% of older Americans, age 65 and above, live in nursing homes at any one time.

Rewards and benefits are also a part of the aging process. With age often comes a more realistic and balanced perspective. Additionally, many older persons have an increased sense of self and direction.

Perfect health, a rare commodity at any age, is not a prerequisite for useful activity. Older persons may have to modify their means or go a bit more slowly to reach their goals, but they are armed with skills and knowledge developed over a lifetime of coping with challenges.

Biased: Old people belong on the shelf. They shouldn't take a younger person's job.
Not Biased: No one belongs on the shelf. We each have something to contribute.

Biased: What do they have to look forward to? Food stamps and old age relief!
Not Biased: Most older persons live comfortably, but some are poor and wholly dependent on food stamps and SSI . . . They help, but are not enough.

Biased: Old people should retire. They've lost their skills. They can't do a decent job.
Not Biased: Forced retirement does not make sense for individuals or businesses. Many older persons have valuable skills that can only be acquired over many years.

The older population encompasses all economic levels: affluent, middle class, and poor. Most older persons, in fact 88% of those age 65 or more, have adequate incomes. Nonetheless, poverty is a fact of life for all too many elderly persons, particularly women and minorities, who account for most of the aged poor.

Approximately 12% of persons age 50 and above have incomes below the poverty line and another 13% are considered "near poor." For many of these aged poor, poverty is a new experience. Generally, retirement income is only half to two-thirds of preretirement income.

There are, however, some ameliorating factors. Because many retain some assets, primarily their homes, most of the aged poor do not live in tenements or run-down housing. Of the older population as a whole, 29% live in small towns and rural areas, which normally have a lower cost of living. And, of course, retired persons do not bear the high costs of commuting to work, or other work-related expenditures.

Yet, even with mandatory retirement laws, many older men and women remain in the workforce. In 1985, 35% of those age

age 50 or over were employed, representing nearly 20% of the total labor force. Furthermore, 10.8% of those 65 and over continue to work, representing 2.5% of the labor force. With changes in mandatory retirement, more and more elderly persons may seek to continue working.

Naturally, income is one reason older persons stay in their jobs or take new ones. A second factor of perhaps equal importance is the desire to continue contributing to society. For some, this means using their expertise in the same field, but many take this time to expand their horizons by choosing new careers, often in areas of interest they never had time to pursue before.

OUT AND ABOUT

Biased: Retired people just sit and watch life pass them by.
Not Biased: In retirement, many people become involved in activities they didn't have time for when they were working.

Biased: Tennis is a game for the young. As with most sports, a thirty-five year old is over-the-hill.
Not Biased: Tennis is a sport for all ages. You may slow down as you get older, but by using the strategic expertise developed over the years, you can still play a tough game.

Biased: A smart politician goes after the youth vote.
Not Biased: A smart politician does not overlook the power of any segment of voters.

Most older persons are concerned about their communities. Most care about the issues which affect their life and country. And they take action: they study the issues; they vote. In the 1980 presidential election, 67.7% of those 50 years or over voted. Even in mid-term elections, older voters go to the polls. In 1982, 61.3% cast their ballots.

On a more personal level, 28% of all persons age 50 and older, devote time and energy doing volunteer work in the community. Their contributions are as varied as their talents.

Older persons are active in schools, community centers, religious institutions, and other organizations. In the American Association of Retired Persons programs alone, there are more than 250,000 volunteers.

These facts are in marked contrast to the typical depiction of older persons. They are stereotyped as docile, cranky, and selfish, remaining uninvolved and content to attend funerals, watch television, and talk about "the good old days" with peers.

Fortunately, personal growth and development are dynamic processes that do not end at age thirty, fifty, or sixty-five. Age brings with it the potential of attaining an enriched emotional, spiritual, and intellectual well-being even as, or perhaps because, people must adjust to the changes and losses that accompany the passage of time.

Active participation in all facets of life is normal for older persons. Sports, word puzzles, and games of skill and chance remain important leisure pastimes. For many, old age is the time when a lifetime's accumulation of learning and experience is shared with others.

RELATIONSHIPS: LOVE, FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Biased: Most older people are socially isolated and lonely.
Not Biased: The degree to which a person is socially isolated is not determined by one's age.

Biased: Most older people are neglected by their families.
Not Biased: Most older people are close to their families.

Biased: It's silly for people over 65 to fall in love.
Not Biased: You're never too old to fall in love.

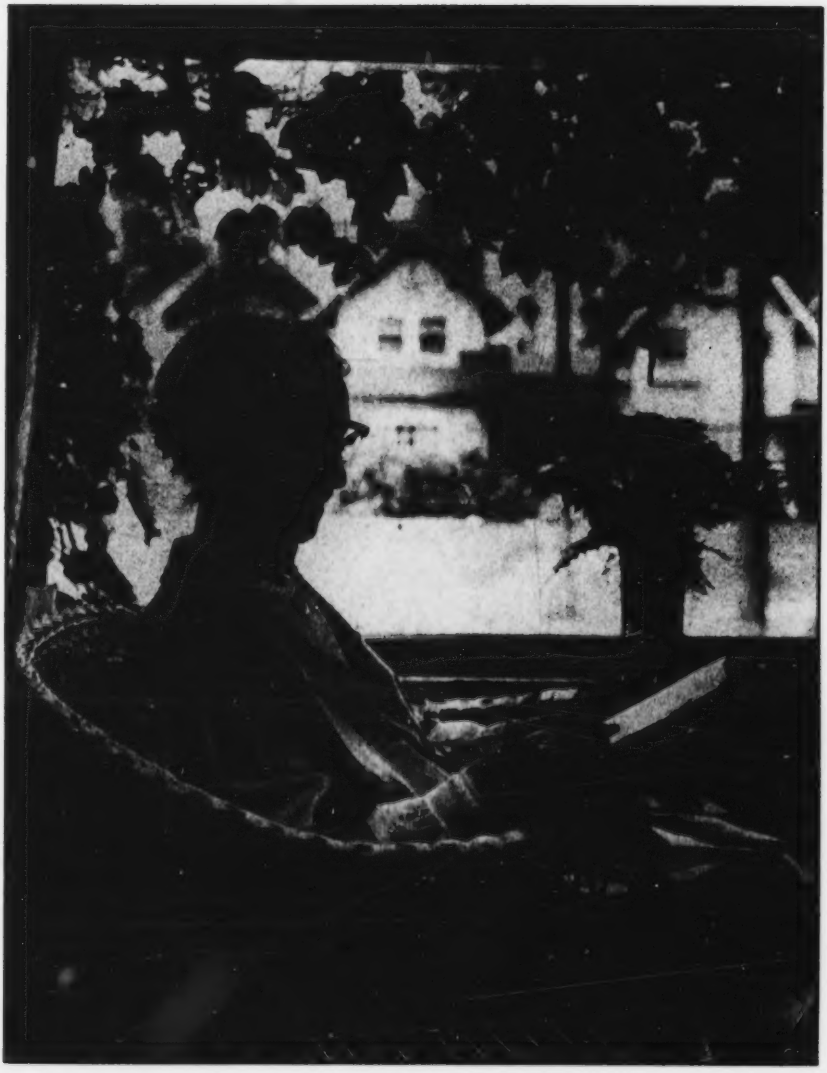
The majority of older people enjoy an active social life and maintain close relationships with their family and other persons important to them. A quick look at the data on living arrangements is illustrative.

Seventy-six percent of men and 46% of women 50 years of age and older live with their spouses. Another 7% of older men and 18% of older women live with other relatives or nonrelated persons. Yet, independence is highly valued as evidenced by the increasing number of older persons who choose to live alone. Currently, 13% of men and 32% of women live alone.

While society is becoming more isolated by age group, older persons usually maintain a network of contacts with a variety of groups. They are more likely to be members, and active members, of clubs, religious groups, and community organizations.

Love and sexuality are a part of aging. Meaningful personal relationships are as important in the later years as they are in youth. The desire for satisfying companionship, both emotional and physical, is perhaps even greater in later years.

LIFE:
ON-THE-JOB TRAINING



Biased: Old people are unable to adjust to change.
Not Biased: Some people are slow to adjust to change.

Biased: Most old people are pretty much alike.
Not Biased: All people are individuals who become more unique with age and a lifetime of experiences.

Age alone is not an adequate explanation for older people's attitudes and values; their source lies in the accumulation of past experiences and social factors.

Members of today's older generation were born just after the turn of the century and their experiences have been substantially different from those born later. When they were attending school, for example, norms of educational attainment were much lower than they are today. Similarly, this generation was trained for occupations and skills that in some cases have become obsolete. The technological changes this group has witnessed are phenomenal —a major percentage were born before the airplane and automobile, much less the space shuttle. As Shakespeare put it:

> "The oldest hath borne most: we that are young, shall never see so much, nor live so long."
>
> — King Lear v,iii,325

In addition to these social changes, the older generation was socialized by a work ethic that emphasized achievement through labor and self-sacrifice. This attitude was harshly reinforced in the depression years when often simple survival demanded extreme self-sacrifice.

Even those now approaching age 50 have been influenced by significantly different life experiences than those already past 50. The effects of mere aging pale in comparison to the impact of life and living.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Ageism is an insidious denial of the potential of all individuals: the currently old, the soon-to-be-old, and those who cannot yet imagine being old. It is inaccurate and untrue, yet so pervasive that it is difficult to detect without a conscious effort.

The following ten recommendations will help you avoid ageism and supplant it with a realistic portrait of growing old. Keep in mind, however, that these are guidelines only and are no substitute for awareness and sensitivity by the individual author, publisher, director, producer, teacher, or artist.

1. Include older persons. Where possible, include elders in proportion to their distribution in the general population; approximately one in every four Americans is 50 or older.

2. Include older women more frequently than older men; fifty-five out of a hundred older persons are female.

3. Present a balanced view of the physical process of aging, citing both the strengths and abilities as well as the physical difficulties.

4. Recognize older persons' potential for attaining an enriched emotional, spiritual, social, and intellectual life.

5. Show older persons in a number of different living arrangements: living independently alone or with a spouse, children, or nonrelatives.

6. Avoid over-representation of nursing home living; only one in twenty persons (age 65 and above) live in nursing homes at any one time.

7. Show older persons at all economic levels: affluent, middle-class, and poor.

8. Accord some older men and women an occupational identity, working in diverse employment settings; three out of a hundred older persons work.

9. Show older women pursuing interests that extend beyond the family setting.

10. Affirm the individuality of older persons and show them in a variety of lifestyles commensurate with their needs and abilities.

Remember, Older Persons Are:

- Human beings with needs that include the desire for sexual expression.
- Adults with individual personality traits and social values developed over time within a complex societal environment.
- Active, creative and involved individuals who engage in a wide range of worthwhile activities.
- Complex, three-dimensional persons who exhibit a range of realistic emotions and behaviors.

WORDS, WORDS, WORDS

Words are carefully selected by writers for both their exact meaning and their connotation. The latter is particularly important in expressing underlying social attitudes and values. Therefore, you should consider both word attributes to help ensure an accurate portrayal of older persons.

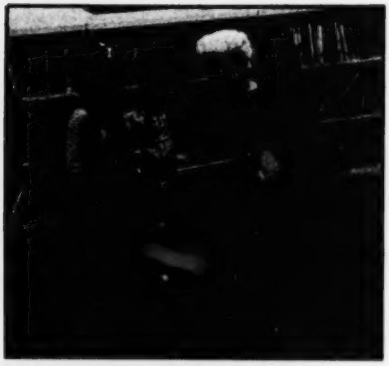
Language certainly need not be dull, but words and phrases that demean, patronize or stereotype must be eliminated. For instance, avoid:

- Patronizing adjectives such as cute, sweet, dear, and little.
- Negative physical descriptors such as crippled, deaf, dentured, emaciated, feeble, fragile, frail, frowning, gray, inactive, wrinkled, withered, dirty, and doddering.
- Negative personality descriptors such as cheerless, dull, eccentric, foolish, morose, meek, obstinate, queer, sad, and senile.
- Demeaning labels and expressions such as old maid, old codger, old biddy, fuddy duddy, lecher, crone, old fool, Geritol generation, golden agers, has been, over the hill, out of date, and fading fast.
- Stereotypic descriptions of older women as passive, dependent, frivolous, shrewish, and nagging.

Passages that unnecessarily exclude older persons or otherwise inaccurately treat the experience of aging can easily be revised without loss of style or meaning. For example:

Biased: This is a progressive company. The management training program offers bright young men and women the opportunity to step right into important positions without a long waiting period. This situation is mutually desirable for the company and the future executives. For the company, it provides a reliable source of new blood. For the youth, it puts them right into the swing of things when they are still vital and alive. No longer is it unheard-of for a company like this one to have a president and executive staff all under the age of forty.

Not Biased: This is a progressive company. The management training program is open to bright, motivated men and women. It offers those with



management potential the opportunity to move rapidly into important positions. This situation is mutually desirable for both the company and its future executives. It puts trainees on the fast-track to responsible, rewarding executive positions.

Biased: The many islands, large and small, off the southeast coast of the United States have become a popular year 'round playground for the young and the "young at heart." These islands have much to offer those who are looking for adventure with a touch of class.

Palm trees and sandy beaches . . . color . . . style . . . lively night life . . . and young multilingual people.

Not Biased: The many islands, large and small, off the southeast coast of the United States have become a popular year 'round vacation spot. These islands have much to offer those who are looking for adventure with a touch of class in their leisure: Palm trees and sandy beaches . . . color . . . style . . . night life . . . and multilingual people.

PICTURE THIS...

All stereotypes have some basis in fact, but the focus is on the exception, rather than the norm. To ensure accuracy while increasing variety, avoid more than the occasional depiction of older persons:

- Nodding off, rocking in chairs, knitting, watching television.
- Baking cookies, babysitting, whittling.
- Wearing ill-fitting, dark, out-of-style clothes, "orthopedic" shoes, hats.
- Living in nursing homes.
- Engaging in passive, slow-moving sports such as walking, golfing, fishing, playing cards, or chess "in the park."
- With only other old people or very young children.
- With only peers of the same sex.
- Alone.
- Idle.

Age sometimes brings physical disabilities. Although most older people have no debilitating problems and should be shown without sensory or physical impairment, remember, however, that persons of any age who have physical disabilities, work, play, and volunteer with others in our society.

More accurate and positive alternatives show older people:

- Dancing, shopping, dining out, gardening, traveling, doing volunteer work.
- Working as lawyers, teachers, doctors, artisans, business people.
- Wearing well-fitted, stylish, but not fadish clothing in tasteful colors.
- Living independently.
- Using few orthopedic devices.
- Playing tennis, skiing, swimming, jogging, sailing.
- With hair of various colors, including gray and white, in classic and popular styles, with teeth, and with good posture.
- With people of all ages.
- With persons of the opposite sex in couples and groups.
- Active.

In everyday life, older persons can be seen in a variety of business, recreational, and civic situations. Show them that way.

Presentation often determines whether a message is successfully communicated. Because reading and hearing are in part physical actions, the physical aspects of a printed work or audiovisual production define to whom your communication is accessible. If people cannot read it or hear it, they can never be part of the audience.

Layout, graphics, color, and fonts, as well as pacing and sound in films, video, and slide shows are just some of the choices made in putting together a presentation. In making the choices, budget and time constraints are weighed against aesthetic content, targeting and image criteria. As a result, selections may be made that inadvertently exclude millions of people from the audience. These are the people of all ages who have a visual, hearing, or other physical impairment.

Impairments of the senses are surprisingly common and occur in people of all ages. Not surprisingly, because eyes and ears age with the rest of the body, vision and hearing problems are more prevalent in older persons. About half of those with visual or audio handicaps are older.

The following suggestions and considerations are drawn from research in areas related to communications, for example, on reading speed, and from observations in the field by experts.

Even with corrective lenses or medical treatments, millions of Americans have less than 20/20 vision. The causes vary. Some are congenital, but no one is immune. By about age 30, everyone's sight will have begun deteriorating. By age 65, virtually every person will suffer some loss in ability to focus, to resolve images, to discern colors and to adapt to light. Over 60% of those considered visually impaired are older persons.

These people need not be written off. The lack of perfect vision can, to a degree, be compensated for in presentation without impairing the budget or style.

In Contrast

Contrast is the first element in seeing and the greater the contrast, the easier an image is to discern. Contrast depends upon light and definition. If there is a spot on a large sheet of paper, it must be sufficiently different—either brighter or darker—than the background or it will not be perceived and the process of seeing essentially stops.

Color is identified by the amount and frequency of light reflected back to the eye. For instance, black, the absence of color, is the least reflective and absorbs light from across the spectrum. Since white is most reflective, the contrast is greatest between black and white. Because all colors absorb some light, the use of color reduces the level of brightness contrast. Maintaining good contrast is even more difficult when using both colored ink and paper.

The level of contrast is critical to visually impaired persons because many impairments, particularly those that result from age, affect light sensitivity. Opacities in the eye, including clouding of the lens and cataracts, reduce significantly the amount of light that passes through the eye.

Reduced light sensitivity lowers the contrast threshold at which impaired persons begin to

"see." In choosing colors, then, the contrast between red ink on pink paper versus red ink on white paper clearly points to the selection of red on white.

Because of the yellowing of the eye, images to older persons may appear as if seen through a yellow veil. This phenomenon can be readily duplicated by using a yellow filter to check the contrast and appearance of your work to older readers. Another result of yellowing is that less violet light is registered by the eye; it becomes progressively more difficult to match blues and greens. It is, therefore, often easier for older persons to discriminate among reds, oranges, and yellows than among blues, greens, and purples.

Awareness of this reduced color sensitivity is especially important in the selection of colors for bar graphs and drawings where understanding is contingent upon distinguishing between colors. Using colors from different ends of the spectrum or amplifying the difference with dots or crosshatches helps ensure clarity.

Along with the comparative contrast in light and dark of the image to its background, the crispness of the edge determines the visibility of an image. Image formation, the recognition of a form or letter, occurs at the edge and is dependent upon the edge gradient—the rate of change between light and dark. Any factor that actually blurs, or appears to blur, the edge, hampers vision. For instance, glare or dazzle greatly reduces the seeming contrast at the edge, which suggests shiny paper and metallic inks be used sparingly. Enlarging and poor printing quality muddy the edge of an image, again reducing contrast.

Because colors have varying degrees of visibility, color selection and interaction also affect image definition. Yellow, for instance, has a very high velocity, hence visibility. For distance viewing, on billboards, films, and slides, yellow—particularly against a black background—is an excellent choice. If not toned down, however, yellow's intensity at close range can cause the edge to dance or vibrate, thereby reducing the apparent contrast and making reading difficult.

Font-in-Blur

If the contrast is sufficient for an image to be perceived, identification, the next step in seeing, is controlled by the size and detail of the image. In reading, this depends on the choice of font—type style and size—and the spacing—leading and proportion.

The ability to focus declines with age, impairing a person's ability to distinguish small interstices and variations in form. Many visually impaired persons suffer a loss of central vision. In both cases, larger print and more sizeable images are easier to see.

Copy in small type set closely together is difficult to read.
(8 point Paladium boldface, no leading)

Same type, same size. The only difference is the leading or white space between the lines. Leading increases readability.
(8 point Paladium boldface, 1 point leading)

Type size itself is a critical factor. You can see the difference two type sizes larger (with just ½ point in leading) makes in legibility.
(10 point Paladium boldface, ½ point leading)

The size of the type, although crucial, is not the sole consideration. Style is important to readability. Ornate faces, italics, and styles with extraneous squiggles are more difficult to discern. They tend to clutter the image without imparting any useful information, a principle that applies to all visuals. In general, serif type has been shown to be preferred by readers. But in the selection of type, it is perhaps most useful to look at the size and frequency of the smallest dimension of the letters (including interior white spaces) because it is this dimension that largely determines visibility.

The "free" or white space around a letter or image is as important as the letter itself. Proportional spacing, where the white space between letters is kept constant regardless of letter width, should always be used.

Also, the leading or spacing between lines of type combined with the font make copy readable. Within reasonable limits, trade-offs between the two—smaller type with an additional point or two of leading, and vice versa—can be used to

create the desired effect, conserve paper space and maintain readability. There are limits to the benefit of leading: over three points is almost as difficult to read as unleaded copy.

Reading continuous copy or following a coherent sequence of images makes fewer demands on the visual ability of the audience because context and perceptual clues aid understanding. In print, indentation of paragraphs and the use of standard capitalization also provide visual clues, which improve reading.

When faced with single words or phrases, or non-sequential images, these context clues are lost. The labeling of graphs, schematic drawings, and other visual aids—whether on a page or screen—require particular attention to ensure they really aid understanding. The type should be clean, perhaps bold faced, as large as possible, and set against a high contrast background. Additionally, when the reader's ability to understand a figure depends on being able to differentiate between various lines, the lines should be made to look very different from one another. A thin dashed line and a thin solid line can be readily confused; the use of dashes divided by small triangles or circles is much clearer to the viewer.

Bite Size

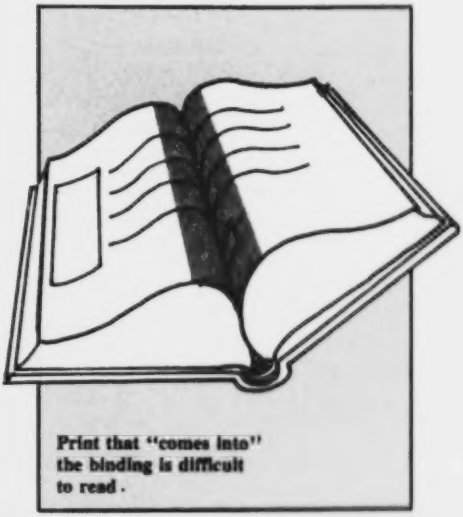
The food industry has learned well the attraction of bite-sized snacks. People have a similar reaction to the written word. Smaller blocks of copy are much more agreeable and easier to read. Divisions, both horizontal and vertical, are effective and can be achieved by using shorter lines of type and more paragraphs.

The optimum line length is not set. It depends on the type size and leading although it appears that the maximum comfortable length is from five to six inches. Columning frequently affords maximum use of available space, and may improve readability.

Although this line is set in 10 point Paladium boldface with 1 point leading, the len

Marginal Differences

Margins are, of course, necessary, but other than aesthetic relief afforded by "white space," the use of margins wider than one-quarter inch appears to have little impact on readability. The sole exception is the interior margin of a bound publication, especially large paperbacks. If the print "comes into" the binding, it is exceedingly difficult to read because of the curve, the reduction in available light, and the physical adjustments that need to be made in order to see.



Print that "comes into" the binding is difficult to read.

Maintenance of a straight left-hand margin helps readers follow the copy, whereas it appears that justification of the right-hand edge has little effect.

Surprisingly, side bars truly are more readable. Not only do they tend to be "bite-size," but many readers prefer a vertical line on either side of the copy.

the line makes it difficult to read. A comfortable line length is from five to six inches.

Time and environment are two additional factors that affect one's ability to see. A reader can, if desired, adjust the lighting, hold a book closer or further away and spend hours reading only one passage. These options are not available to the viewer of most audiovisual presentations.

In film strips, slide shows, movies, and television, time is controlled by the producer. Generally, a viewer with sensory loss is unable to compensate for a bit more time on a scene. This makes the audience even more dependent on the quality of the image and awareness of the producer.

With the exception of television, the environment for watching most audiovisual productions is beyond the control of both the viewer and producer. Unfortunately, the normal environment—a darkened room with a limited range of viewing distance—compounds the problems of the visually impaired, particularly older persons. In this situation, one of "dark adaptation," sensitivity to brightness contrast and visual acuity (the ability to distinguish detail) are both reduced.

As Time Goes By

The ability to adapt to changes in lighting usually decreases with age, but problems of impaired viewers can be minimized by keeping a fairly constant and high, but not excessively bright, level of lighting on the screen. The use of gradual transitions from scene to scene or slide to slide (where possible) greatly aids viewing. Finally, when a sudden dramatic change in light is desired, the difficulties can be alleviated by holding the new scene long enough for impaired viewers to adjust and by avoiding crucial visual action in the first few minutes unless accompanied by sufficient audio clues.

Even for younger people and those without visual impairments, adapting to changes in light still takes time. For instance, after walking into a dark theatre from bright sunlight, it takes from two to four minutes before reasonable sensitivity is regained. Total adaptation takes about twenty minutes.

As we age, it takes us longer to register a new image clearly. There is a carryover of the previous image's form and color that interferes with seeing the "new" image. When green and red are flashed in quick succession, an older person is more likely to integrate the colors and "see" yellow. In essence, a new scene starts a second or so later for older persons, which again suggests delaying any crucial visual action for several seconds after a major scene shift.

A Fair Hearing

By definition, the success of an audiovisual presentation depends on another physical ability of its audience hearing. For over 19 million Americans, approximately half of whom are 50 or older, this physical ability is significantly impaired. In fact, most people's hearing is less than "perfect." By age twenty, sensitivity to sound, particularly of a high frequency, begins to diminish, and continues to diminish with age.

Aside from volume control, captioning, and stereo, there are other variables a producer can control to maximize the audience's understanding of the audio presentation.

First and foremost is awareness and control of background noise because, more than anything else, it interferes with the dialogue or narrative. The higher the ratio of narrative to ambient noise, the better the understanding of the audience. For instance, an outside scene can be established by traffic sounds which are then dropped as the dialogue begins. For news broadcasts, relatively quiet sites should be selected for stand-ups and interviews.

The dialogue or narration itself also deserves attention. Good diction, clear tones in the lower ranges, and at a natural rate—speaking not too fast and not too slowly—all measurably increase the ability to hear and understand. Mumbling, "fast talk" and other vocal devices ideally should only be used if they are necessary for artistic purposes. In contrast, the ability to understand accented speech, unless it is overly heavy, depends primarily on a person's individual experiences.

Generally, it also helps hearing impaired persons to be able to see the speaker's face.

Finally, if off-screen sound is important to the action, a visual cue helps understanding. This is particularly applicable when the sound is in the higher frequency range, such as a whistle or sounds with an "f," "th," "s," or "z," as in "sh-sh-sh" for "quiet."

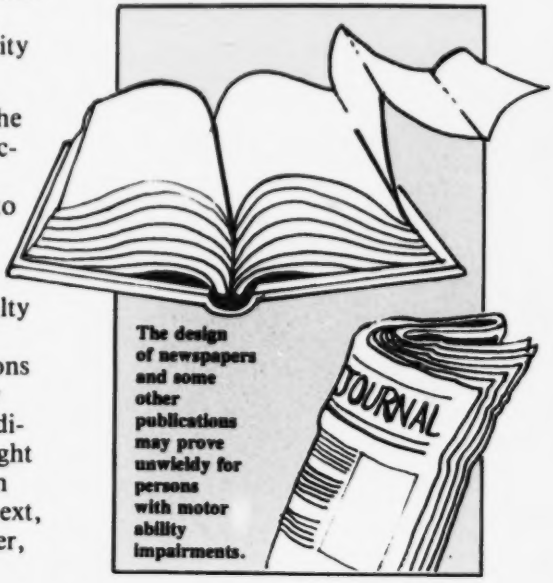
Unlike producers, publishers must consider the manual abilities of their audience. A reader holds the book and turns the pages.

These simple manual tasks are difficult for many and become increasingly difficult with age. Arthritis alone afflicts 37 million Americans severely enough to require medical treatment. About one-half of these are older persons, but if we live long enough, everyone shows some evidence of arthritis. Heart attacks and strokes, other common problems of the elderly, can also reduce dexterity and strength.

Weight, size, paper, and the need for support are four factors that can hamper the accessibility of publications to those with motor ability impairments.

Everyone has some difficulty handling heavy objects. But physically handicapped persons may judge weight differently from those who are not handicapped. For this reason, weight is an important consideration when selecting cover stock, text, paper, and binding. Moreover, the division into volumes, perhaps packaged as a unit in a separate jacket, rather than a single tome, becomes an attractive option.

Size and shape are of comparable importance in manageability. A newspaper is a classic example of the unwieldy. In general, publications that require awkward or complicated movements to unfold, the full use of the arms, or a regular readjustment are more difficult for those with limited strength or dexterity.



The design of newspapers and some other publications may prove unwieldy for persons with motor ability impairments.

Turning the page is essential to reading virtually any publication. It is perhaps the most difficult task for persons with impaired dexterity, a problem often accompanied by the loss of sensation. Selecting a certain paper can be helpful—paper with some texture and a high "feel-factor" is easier to grasp. While there is no standard measure, this factor can easily be tested by trying to rapidly collate pages of the various papers under consideration.

The fourth factor that affects this segment of your audience is the need to support a publication. A single action is not as difficult as a continuous effort, needed, for instance, to hold a book open. Size and shape influence the amount of effort needed in reading. With a large printed area, it is less likely a single page can be read flat on a table, or propped in one position. Again, a newspaper requires constant rearrangement to read even one page.

The binding in books and larger publications, however, is most important. A book with a spiral binding lies flat and stays open to a given page; it is much easier to manage, and hence, easier to read, than one that snaps closed without constant vigilance.

The American Association of Retired Persons is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to helping older Americans achieve lives of independence, purpose, and dignity. By providing a wide range of direct member benefits and services and a host of community service programs and activities, the Association has become the nation's largest organization of older citizens. For additional information, write:

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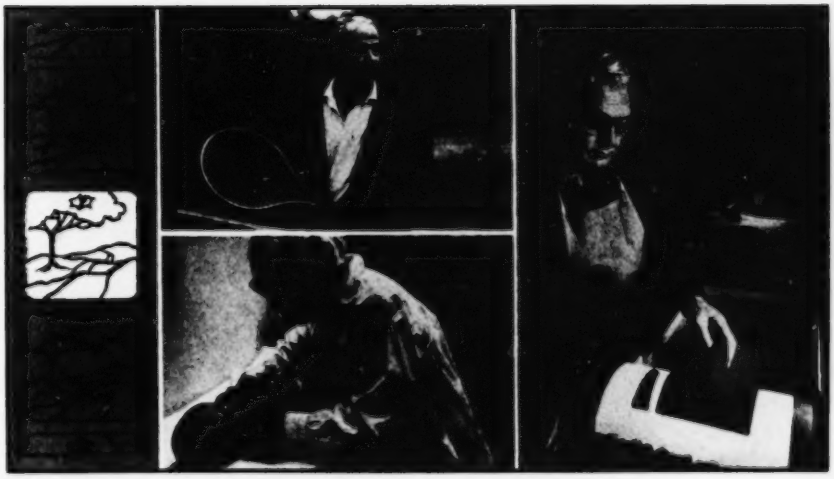

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